

\$12 Million "Bridge to Nowhere" Would Serve Few, Destroy Current Bridge Listed on National Register of Historic Places

Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today wrote New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) Commissioner Joan McDonald to request that plans to replace the Pond Eddy Bridge in Sullivan County be changed to preserve and improve the current historic bridge. According to the Federal Highway Administration, NYSDOT plans to spend more than \$5 million in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) for the construction of a new bridge, which has an estimated total price tag of \$12 million. The proposed 40-ton capacity "bridge to nowhere" would extend across the New York border to serve only about dozen Pennsylvania residents. Hinchey believes the tax dollars would be better spent addressing the growing backlog of bridge and road projects in New York.

"The estimated \$12 million construction costs of a new bridge far exceed the total market value of the few homes and private lots that a new structure would ostensibly serve," Hinchey wrote. "Such use of New York's limited transportation funding to serve a handful of out of state residents seems inconsistent with the state's commitment to fiscal responsibility and counter to any rational prioritization for available infrastructure monies."

Hinchey also noted that the proposed bridge would adversely impact important historic, scenic and recreational resources in the Upper Delaware corridor. Constructed in 1904, the existing bridge slated for removal is one of only four petit truss bridges surviving in New York State and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The NYS Office of Historic Preservation and the national Advisory Council on Historic Preservation both expressed strong concerns in response to PennDOT's push to remove and replace this structure, charging that the agency did not genuinely consider the option of preserving and rehabilitating the historic Bridge to accommodate the small number of daily crossings.

"The demolition of the Pond Eddy Bridge and the construction of a modern, overpass-style replacement structure would diminish the historic character of the Pond Eddy area and adversely affect scenic, recreational and environmental qualities that contribute to the Upper Delaware's federal designation as well as its designation as a New York State Scenic Byway," wrote Hinchey. "As we have seen in previous PennDOT projects in the Upper Delaware, the agency's replacement bridges are sorely out of place and out of scale with the rural character and historic heritage of the River corridor."

Hinchey is also concerned that the project would require interruption of the free flow of the Delaware River for at least one year, negatively impacting recreational use of the river, hurting the local tourism industry. Interruption and changes to the River's flow could also threaten the natural resources of this section of the Delaware, which is classified as Special Protection Waters by the Delaware River Basin Commission.

The full text of Hinchey's 
[letter](#) follows.

March 21, 2012

Ms. Joan McDonald
Commissioner
New York State Department of Transportation
50 Wolf Road
Albany, NY 12232

Dear Commissioner McDonald:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed demolition and replacement of the historic Pond Eddy Bridge in Sullivan County. I urge you to reconsider NYSDOT's commitment of funding for the proposal by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) to construct an expensive new crossing over the Delaware River at Pond Eddy. This project would serve only a small number of Pennsylvania residents along a landlocked, single-lane road in Shohola Township and adversely impact important historic, scenic and recreational resources in the Upper Delaware corridor.

PennDOT's current plan to remove the existing Pond Eddy Bridge and construct a new 40-ton capacity "bridge to nowhere" would squander limited infrastructure funds which could be better used towards the backlog of bridge and road projects in New York. According to the Federal Highway Administration, NYSDOT has programmed more than \$5 million for the construction of a new bridge at Pond Eddy that would handle only a few dozen daily vehicle crossings by residents of Pennsylvania. I understand that the estimated \$12 million construction costs of a

new bridge far exceeds the total market value of the few homes and private lots that a new structure would ostensibly serve. Such use of New York's limited transportation funding to serve a handful of out of state residents seems inconsistent with the State's commitment to fiscal responsibility and counter to any rational prioritization for available infrastructure monies.

This project also threatens to adversely impact significant resources within the "Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River," a federally designated and protected unit of the National Park Service. Congress passed this designation in 1978 to protect for future generations the outstanding scenic, recreational, historic, cultural, and natural qualities of the Upper Delaware River corridor, many of which would be negatively affected by the bridge replacement proposal. Constructed in 1904, the existing bridge slated for removal is one of only four Petit truss bridges surviving in New York State and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The NYS Office of Historic Preservation and the national Advisory Council on Historic Preservation both expressed strong concerns in response to PennDOT's push to remove and replace this structure, charging that the agency did not genuinely consider the option of preserving and rehabilitating the historic Bridge to accommodate the small number of daily crossings.

The demolition of the Pond Eddy Bridge and the construction of a modern, overpass-style replacement structure would diminish the historic character of the Pond Eddy area and adversely affect scenic, recreational and environmental qualities that contribute to the Upper Delaware's federal designation as well as its designation as a New York State Scenic Byway. As we have seen in previous PennDOT projects in the Upper Delaware, the agency's replacement bridges are sorely out of place and out of scale with the rural character and historic heritage of the River corridor. In addition to destroying a unique structure that contributes to the region's historic character, this project would require interruption of the free flow of the Delaware River for at least one year. This diversion of the River would impact the recreational use of the River that is so vital to tourism businesses in Sullivan County. Interruption and changes to the River's flow could also threaten the natural resources of this section of the Delaware, which is classified as Special Protection Waters by the Delaware River Basin Commission.

I urge you to conduct a full review of this proposed project and reconsider alternatives to the replacement of this historic structure. A growing chorus of local municipal leaders and civic organizations are requesting an independent engineering analysis of the historic bridge structure, which is warranted in this case. Re-evaluation of this project could help New York State avoid the wasteful expenditure of critical infrastructure funding on a project of no benefit to the residents and taxpayers of our State.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey